2015 ANNUAL REPORT

Celebrating 75 Years of Service

Serving 38 counties in North Texas and 2 in southern Oklahoma

DALLAS
BONHAM
FORT WORTH
TYLER
BRIDGEPORT
DENTON
GRANBURY
GREENVILLE
POLK STREET
SHERMAN
From Our Director

Our journey towards high reliability was marked with some impressive milestones in 2015.

VA North Texas became the first VA medical facility and second hospital in the country to successfully deploy the vBloc implant, a scientifically advanced weight loss system.

Dallas VAMC was designated a Level Two stroke center, which carries the larger responsibility of providing comprehensive, clinical care to stroke patients.

VA North Texas increased its footprint in Tyler, activating a new primary clinic August 2016 and approved for an additional specialty clinic.

Researchers partnering with the University of Texas at Dallas began exploring Virtual Tele-Rehab that combines telemedicine and physical rehabilitation.

VA North Texas successfully coordinated the 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in June 2015.

Dallas VAMC also celebrated its 75th anniversary of providing timely, high quality health care to North Texas Veterans. Since 1940, our sprawling campus has grown to 84 acres and a team of more than 5,500 dedicated employees who work hard every day to provide and support patient care in a comfortable and safe environment.

Looking ahead, we will continue to focus our energy on timely access to high quality health care providing the right type of care for best possible health outcomes with attention to needs and life goals of our Veterans. We are using SAIL — Strategic Analytics for Improving and Learning — to engage staff and focus on quality outcomes such as patient flow, satisfaction and safety.

No organization understands health conditions and illness directly related to military service better than VA. Providing quality health care services to America’s heroes by employees dedicated to go the extra mile will be our renewed focus going forward.

Jeff Milligan
Director
Facility Highlights

Became the first VA facility to perform implantation of vBloc, a technology-based, scientifically advanced weight loss therapy.

Unveiled a Women Veterans Wall of Honor, celebrating the service and sacrifice of our Nation’s female Veterans at the Community Living Center in Dallas. The wall represents the five military branches and features uniforms and photographs donated by women Veterans.

Hosted an Ethics Symposium in April for Veterans to promote awareness and guide patient decisions for medical ethics in a health care setting.

Hosted a free “come and go” Benefits Fair with Texas Veterans Commission and Veterans Land Board, to ensure Veterans are aware of benefits they are eligible for and have earned.

Convened a Mental Health Summit in August with key community stakeholders to enhance access to mental health services and address mental healthcare needs of Veterans and their family members.

Organized a Suicide Prevention Symposium in September for Veterans, family members, VA staff and the community to better understand related conditions, symptoms and the need for support and treatment.

Conducted the 26th Annual Community Health Fair in November to offer medical resource information and free health services to the community.

Participated in VA’s National Access Stand Down event in November to reach out to all Veterans identified as having acute needs and make sure they can be seen by VA or in the community.

Using real-time video, 3-D computer-generated worlds, and force-feedback “haptic” devices, VA North Texas physicians began a research project to combine telemedicine and physical rehabilitation to provide Veterans with faster, easier, more convenient access to rehabilitation services.

Recognized as a “Leader in LGBT Healthcare Equality” by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, the educational arm of the country’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights organization.

Designated a Primary Level Two Stroke Center by the American Hospital Association/American Stroke Association, reflecting the organization’s commitment to stroke education, quick treatment, and quality outcomes.

Hosted the Annual Regional Veterans Day Program in November with Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center and City of Bonham.

### Fiscal Year 2015

- **Increased staffing:** 966 new employees from April 2014 to September 2015 to include:
  - 65 Physicians
  - 225 Nurses

### By Race, Ethnicity and Gender

- **Black Female:** 21.54%
- **White Female:** 27.47%
- **White Male:** 15.41%
- **Black Male:** 15.07%
- **Asian Female:** 7.62%

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **Top 3 Tier Pay Grades (GS 13-15)**
  - 883 positions with 2% minorities
- **Middle 3 Tier Pay Grade (GS 9-12)**
  - 1603 positions with 59% minorities
- **Leadership Promotions**
  - 45 employees promoted with 44% minorities and 62% female
- **Senior Level Positions**
  - 61 employees selected with 36% minorities and 69% female

### VolunTEERS

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WHEELCHAIR GAMES

The VA North Texas and Lone Star Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America hosted the 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in June. Competing in 18 sporting events such as basketball, handcycling and motorized wheelchair rally, more than 600 wheelchair athletes with spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, amputations and other neurological conditions pushed through physical limitations to improve their health, independence and overall well-being.

In FY 15, Quality, Safety Value (QSV) Service facilitated a successful joint Commission Opioid Treatment Program Survey, as well as three program accreditation reviews conducted by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). QSV also guided various internal reviews, including VA Office of Inspector General and continues to enhance the Patient Safety program. QSV Systems Redesign leads VISN 17 in Lean Six Sigma trainings, certifications and project savings. Improvement projects grossed over $12,000,000 in type 1 and 2 savings in FY 15!

VA North Texas continues its journey to be a High Reliability Organization. Following the establishment of QSV Service in FY 14, leadership continues to align the health care system to support a culture of patient safety, continuous readiness and robust process improvement. All executives and chiefs have completed Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt training. Some FY 15 initiatives:

- Executive QSV Board is now parent of all governance with redesign of governance structure to focus on QSV
- Implementation of on-going review preparation in External and Internal Review Committees
- Physician champion for patient safety was identified
- “Good Catch” awards were implemented to recognize employees who prevent a potential safety issue
- A third Systems Redesign Coordinator was added
- AIM – Analytics and Information Management reporting capabilities were enhanced

2015 Site Reviews and Survey Successes
The VA North Texas External and Internal Review Committee (EIRC) established an integrated organizational framework to oversee, plan, implement, evaluate and improve survey preparation and continuous readiness for The Joint Commission, VA Office of Inspector General, Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and URAC Call Center.

This new approach transitions from “ramp-up” for survey readiness to a foundation and culture of continuous standards compliance for a highly reliable patient safety system.

Senior managers, medical staff and front-line managers lead interdisciplinary sub-committees and continuous readiness teams, and more than 200 staff members actively participated in continuous readiness projects.

2015 Successes
The Joint Commission Focused Standards Assessment
Continuous readiness teams assessed and validated standards compliance for more than 2,300 elements of performance for the Hospital, Behavioral Health, Nursing Care Center and Home Care Accreditation Programs with only 29 areas of non-compliance. Interdisciplinary teams developed and implemented corrective actions to bring areas of non-compliance into compliance. Improvements included changes in staff education for dementia patients, system-wide training for clinical staff related to infection prevention and control national patient safety goals, policy revisions to ensure alignment and compliance with The Joint Commission standards, and significant improvements to our tissue management program.

The Joint Commission Three-Year Accreditation
Fort Worth Opioid Treatment Program with only two indirect impact requirements for improvement corrected prior to The Joint Commission’s allowable timeframe.

CARF Three-Year Accreditation
Behavioral Health Homeless Program, Community Living Center Rehabilitation Program, Amputee Program, and Spinal Cord Injury Program with minimal findings mostly related to administrative requirements.

BUILDING BLOCKS TO ACHIEVING HIGH RELIABILITY

All people always experience the safest, highest quality, best valued health care across all settings

Leadership Commitment

Quality & Safety Strategy

Quality & Safety Measure

Compliance with Joint Commission Standards and National Patient Safety Goals

Continuous Improvement Measures

The Joint Commission has developed a comprehensive, patient-centered, multi-faceted strategy to prevent errors, reduce harm, improve care, and provide the highest quality and safest care for all patients.

Safety Culture

Adherence

Accreditation

Compliance

VAP7Kz

Please visit www.northtexas.va.gov for more details.
NURSING SERVICES

Nursing Fair

Nursing Service hosted two hiring fairs in 2015, where more than 600 nurses applied for positions in acute care, critical care, outpatient clinics, dialysis, long term care, telemetry, operating room and emergency department. Approximately 200 were hired, adding to the largest workforce group at VA North Texas.

In addition to being the nation’s largest integrated health care system, VA offers opportunities for continuing education and training. Since 1999 when the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program began, 302 VA North Texas staff has received $6.3 million in scholarship awards with the largest growth occurring over the past two years.

Scholarship Coordinator Tydette Tisdell is happy to see so many opportunities available for nurses who have a daily impact on quality patient care.

“Outside of the military health system, only VA has the mandate to advance nurses’ understanding of military exposure and its consequences to Veteran health,” Tisdell said.

PHOTO: Nursing Fair at Dallas VA Medical Center

Fiscal Year 2015

Improved Wait Times and Physician Productivity for Ambulatory Care

- Extended clinic hours into nights and weekends to leverage limited space and enhance convenience for Veterans at all sites.
- Increased delivery of care by telephone and secure messaging to better use provider time, improve access, and meet Veteran care needs without their traveling for a scheduled appointment. Compared to 20.93% in FY2014, improved to 22.43% use of telephone encounters.
- Attained 40.46% of Veterans using secure messaging through June 2015 compared to the VA national average of 27.05%. Veterans opting in for secure messaging was 33.41%.
- Standardized appointment grids resulting in an average gain of more than 14,000 appointments per year.
- Adjusted target panel sizes to match clinical availabilities. To improve efficiencies considering Veteran preference, established patients were shifted from over-emanipled providers and new patients assigned to those with available capacity.
- Increased use of telehealth to 7.85% in order to see more Veterans, reduced or eliminated Veteran travel time, and better leveraged provider time.
- Increased use of e-consults to 6.90% exceeding the VA national average of 6.56%, and improved Veteran access to specialty care without an additional appointment and better leveraged specialty provider time.
- Increased delivery of mental health care by doubling the number of Dallas and tripling Fort Worth mental health primary care providers, giving Veterans access to care without requiring additional specialty care appointments.
- Deployed a robust tool to evaluate specialty care productivity from service level to the provider level.
- Reduced patient “no-shows” and late appointment cancellations using the Audio Care reminder system. In addition, closely monitored no-show rates at bi-weekly meetings.
- Increased clinic visits over the previous year to 1,392,553.
- Completed 97.46% of established primary care, 91.46% of new primary care, 95.88% of established specialty care, 93.9% of new specialty care, 96.4% of established mental health, and 97.1% of new mental health appointments within 30 days of the clinically indicated or preferred date.
- Scheduled 100,867 total pending appointments as of October 2015. The average wait time for Primary Care was 4.13 days; Specialty Care, 4.89 days; and Mental Health, 4.12 days.
- Processed a 10% increase in requests for care in the community totaling 310,380 outpatient visits.
- Surpassed Virtual Care Modality Goal of 35% with a total of 43.62% unique patients which exceeds VA national average of 38.99%.
Patient Centered Care

VA North Texas is pushing boundaries to create a more healthy, healing and welcoming environment for Veterans and their family members.

Creating a patient-centered, healing environment through space planning, furnishings, safety, sustainability and capital improvements can reduce Veterans’ stress, increase their sense of well-being, and also improve health care provider morale and reduce medical errors.

At VA North Texas, providing patient-centered care means high quality medical treatment, advanced technology and equipment, and skilled and compassionate health care professionals. With increased emphasis on access and whole health, the staff is working through a number of initiatives to transform the organization into a warmer, more inviting medical facility.

As part of VA’s larger patient-centered care model, the focus is “What is the best solution that prioritizes the Veteran, is Veteran-driven, and promotes his or her health and well-being?”

To put the healing environment principles into action, VA North Texas identified three simple achievable goals:

1. Visually declutter hospital walls and windows
2. Improve patient understanding of benefits of check-in kiosks
3. Educate and support environment of care inspection teams about healing environment opportunities.

COMPENSATION & PENSION

The Compensation & Pension Section (C&P) improved quality and timeliness significantly above VA national standards and reached its best performance in 10 years.

- Improved the C&P process, including triage, utilization review and scheduling with cooperative efforts by Medical Administration Service, Mental Health, and C&P through use of focused quality improvement joint workgroups.
- Coordinated with VISN 17 leadership to reduce payment backlog to outside contractors who provided overflow medical evaluation services during high demand periods. This directly contributed to retention of contractor services.
- Collaborated with GTC-Lockheed Martin, a disability examination management contractor, to establish and open a new Euless Clinic to provide disability evaluations in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. This clinic expanded overflow capacity to meet current and future demand for disability evaluations.
- Streamlined the Acceptable Clinical Evidence process.
- Revised the computer-based training manual, which serves as a model for the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment. Disability evaluation training for new and current C&P team members has improved significantly.
- Formed the C&P Women’s Health Initiative/Medical Disability Evaluation Work Group with Mental Health to improve evaluations for female Veterans.
- Improved coordination with the Women’s Health Clinic for specialized evaluations.
- Maintained internal quality review of outside contract disability evaluations.
- Established a Disability Benefits Questionnaire Referral Clinic to assist Veterans and staff in primary care and specialty services.
- Reviewed Telehealth/Mental Health C&P evaluations to improve access for Veterans living in rural areas.
- Coordinated radiograph ordering guidelines to ensure consistency with the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment.
- Reviewed coding for C&P medical opinions to more accurately reflect evaluations.
- Launched a performance improvement project to improve the C&P information sheet for Veterans.
- Spearheaded efforts with Mental Health and Medical Administration Service to improve retention efforts of partnering services.
- Collaborated with the Veterans Benefits Administration’s Waco Regional Office to place an experienced Veteran-centered service representative at Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic. Coordination has improved significantly with assisting Veterans who need disability evaluations.
- Began a safety initiative to increase coordination and team training with VA Police.
- Formed a joint Mental Health/C&P De-escalation Advisory Work Group and new de-escalation protocol.
- Advocated for C&P Physician Assistant grade adjustments to appropriately incentivize effort and encourage retention.
- Improved coordination with consulting services.
- Improved emergency response protocols and procedures, including response to possible Ebola exposures.
- Served as subject matter expert and consultant to restructure the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center’s C&P program.
- Provided Medical Review Officer consulting support to VISN 17.
Construction Updates

VA North Texas purchased about 12 acres of nearby land from the Dallas Independent School District for pending construction projects and to help address parking shortages.

A 1,000-car parking garage on the east side of campus is almost finished, and construction of a third parking garage with 400 spaces is underway.

The expansion of the Emergency Department is picking up steam. This project, expected to be completed in 2017, will add more than 29,000 square feet and renovate almost 4,500 square feet of space.

In 2016, construction will begin on an Inpatient Bed Project to renovate two nursing units and increase the total number of beds. In early 2018, construction of a new Ambulatory Surgical Center is expected to start. This 26,000-square-foot surgical center will be home to most of Day Surgery along with pain management, oral surgery, ENT, ophthalmology, and other related specialties.

Other campus projects in the works include expansion of mental health, cardiology, and long-term spinal cord injury center.
PHOTO: “VA played a major part in getting me back on track,” said Air Force Veteran Raymond Crowder, who turned to alcohol and drugs after losing his job and wound up living on the streets for about three years. Recently, Crowder caught up with his Social Worker Cheryl Stringer to thank her for helping him.

Accomplishments

- The Outreach Program actively engaged in street outreach with community partners as Hands of Hope, Catholic Charities Street Outreach Services, and community outreach officers. More than 100 unsheltered Veterans received services and approximately 40 Veterans were housed.
- The Peer Housing Location Assistance Group expanded affordable housing options for Veterans who do not need supportive housing programs.
- VA North Texas exceeded its HUD/VASH vouchers leased with 96.58%. The target was 92%.
- VA North Texas National Call Center for Homeless Veterans and Health Care for Homeless Veterans social worker answered almost 200 calls per month; the second highest call volume in the nation.

- Comprehensive Homeless Center programs received reaccreditation for 3 years from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.
- Grant and Per Diem and Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans exceeded its housing performance measure with 72.7% of Veterans housed. The target was 65%.
- Therapeutic Supported Employment Services conducted two on-site hiring events to directly connect employers with Veterans. These activities generated employment offers for 17 Veterans within two weeks; two offers included salaries of more than $60,000 per year.
- HUD/VASH Massive Screening/Admission events, Housing Fairs, Landlord Fairs, and Universal Homeless Housing Screening tool were recognized as Best Practices by VISN17 and VA Secretary.

- Dr. Cruz and collaborators worked to develop antibodies for use in the treatment of metastatic cancers, especially melanoma.

- Dr. Bedimo showed that both HIV and chronic hepatitis C significantly increase fracture risk. Studies of different mechanisms have shown treatment of hepatitis C might improve fracture risk.

- Dr. Adinoff found that patients being treated for cocaine dependence with increased brain activity in the hippocampus are more likely to relapse suggesting that quieting this area may decrease the risk for relapse following treatment.

- They are partnering with the iPerform Center at UTA and UTD and Dallas VA Research Corporation, developing and testing virtual reality and computer-assisted rehabilitation tools for Veterans with hand and arm limitations.

Panciano Cruz, MD, Dermatology

Roger Bedimo, MD, Infectious Diseases

Bryon Adinoff, MD, Psychiatrist/Addiction

James LePage, Ph.D., ACOS, Research & Development

Shawn Geiser, Engineering Intern

2015 CIA Employee of the Year — Perry Pahanish

Perry Pahanish was recognized among all Employees of the Month in the Courtesy in Action program and received $500 for his actions.

As lead wheelchair specialist, Perry saw that a Veteran’s wheelchair was in desperate need of repair. Prosthetics was not open for business yet, but he found temporary parts to get the Veteran on his way. When new parts arrived Perry called the Veteran to come in for a more permanent fix.

VA North Texas provides great care, thanks to employees like Perry!

2015 Employees of the Month

JAN Helen Miller, Nursing

FEB Rhonda Steward, MAS

MAR Traci Steinitz, Nutrition & Food

APR Karen Clark, Pharmacy

MAY Steve Foreman, Ambulatory Care

JUN Perry Pahanish, Prosthetics

JUL Lori Burt, Social Work

AUG Cody Nichols, Ambulatory Care

SEP Sonya Williams, Nursing

OCT Gregory Brown, PAS

NOV Patience Nivokocha, Mental Health

DEC Shane Bankston, Engineering
Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center leadership made a commitment to promote personal and professional staff development through an annual retreat. Physicians, nurses, therapists, psychologist, social workers and administrative staff participated in fun and productive activities that nourished mind, body and soul, including reflection on personal and professional goals. Quiet time and opportunities to contemplate and journal were encouraged, and staff shared their goals regarding work community and personal perspective during the strategic planning discussion.

The retreat demonstrated techniques and strategies to help employees create a sustainable healthy work life. After yoga and mindful meditation the team returned to work with a sense of unity and renewed commitment to support each other and positively impact the patient centered care culture in SCI.

Since the retreat, Zulma Jimenez, RN, MSN and Evelyn Quinones, RN, MSN were nominated to the Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals SCIN board of directors. This is truly a personal and professional accomplishment that reflects a life-long commitment to caring for Veterans with SCI disorders.

In 2015, SCI completed two projects that enhance the patient experience. The Internet Café and Recreation Lounge provides computer and communications access, while acupuncture, aromatherapy and mindful meditation are available in the Center for Holistic Health. Qigong and massage therapy are soon to follow. SCI also received three-year accreditation by the 2015 Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. Surveyors noted two best practices for SCI Video Telehealth and Home Care programs documented to decrease the incidence of secondary complications and readmissions post discharge as well as achieving an unplanned readmission rate of 0 for the last three years.

To wrap up a great year, SCI selected Tamara S. Beeler, RKT, ATRIC as Employee of the Year. A former Navy Corpsman, Tammy has dedicated her career to the VA and is a strong Veteran advocate, volunteering her time every year at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

What a great return on investment – a simple retreat to empower and appreciate employees, keeps on giving!
VA operates the nation’s largest integrated health care system with more than 1,700 sites of care serving 8.76 million Veterans each year. Along with benefits and burial services, VA is a complex system which can be difficult to navigate. Veterans are not always aware of how to access services and often receive disjointed care and conflicting referrals.

Recognizing this disconnect, VA looked to community leaders to establish “MyVA Communities.” These collaborative partnerships, led by a local Veteran engagement board and co-chaired by respected leaders with experience serving Veterans, are a framework for VA and its communities, Veterans, Veteran advocates, service organizations, resource providers, and other stakeholders to establish and guide regional Veteran initiatives.

Partnering with VA North Texas, retired Marine Col. Bill Dwiggins and retired Army Col. Chris Martin established the North Texas “MyVA Communities” Board to serve Dallas, Tarrant, Collin, and Denton counties with more than 320,000 Veterans.

The Board held its first meeting in November 2015 and identified four immediate priorities:

- PTSD
- Homelessness
- Under/Over Employment
- Transportation

Moving forward, the North Texas MyVA Communities will leverage its collective strengths to improve the Veteran experience and better understand the challenges Veterans face transitioning from military service and enrolling in VA care.

Next year, this program is expected to empower Veterans to be the driving force behind personalized care; engaging both patient and family in the health management experience. Clinicians will also have increased access to Veteran feedback, facilitating an experience where care quality and transparency are mutual goals of the health care team and the Veteran.

Through VA’s Accelerating Access to Care Initiative, VA North Texas further empowered Veterans by expanding the use of care in the community. ACI expenditures totaled $9,248,621 while non-VA care expenditures were $78,108,284 (annualized).

Celebrating 75 Years of Service